United Nations A/65/352

General Assembly

Distr.: General
7 September 2010

Original: English

Sixty-fifth session
Item 20 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Sustainable development: follow-up to and implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Letter dated 31 August 2010 from the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/17 of 23 July 2009, it is my pleasure to transmit to you the summary of the Council debate on the review of United Nations support for small island developing States (see annex), held under agenda item 13 (a) on 20 and 21 July 2010, during the general segment of the 2010 substantive session of the Council. I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly and bring it to the attention of the high-level review of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly to assess progress made in addressing the vulnerabilities of small island developing States through the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

(*Signed*) Somduth **Soborun**
Vice President of the Economic and Social Council

* A/65/150.

10-50692 (E) 170910

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 31 August 2010 from the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council addressed to the President of the General Assembly

2010 Economic and Social Council substantive session
General segment

Discussion on small island developing States
20 and 21 July 2010

1. On 20 July 2010, Ambassador Somduth Soborun, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council and Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the United Nations, chaired the panel discussion on the theme "Opportunities for small island developing States". In his opening remarks, Ambassador Soborun stated that small island developing States are often portrayed simply as victims of climate change, particularly natural disasters. While it is true that small island developing States may be more vulnerable than other countries to the effects of challenges such as climate change owing to their small size, remoteness and vulnerability to external economic and environmental shocks, many of them have notable strengths and have the potential for being their own agents for change. Therefore, the focus of the panel discussion was to explore potential opportunities in the agricultural, energy and service sectors for these countries with a view towards building resilience as they confront climate change and the fall-out of the economic and financial crisis.

2. The first sub-topic focused on the opportunities in research and development related to the emergence of new crops owing to the changes to the ecosystem, caused for example, by climate change. The second sub-topic explored opportunities for developing technology to reduce harmful emissions and to improve energy efficiency and energy security. The third sub-topic concentrated on initiatives that help small island developing States develop comparative advantages in the services sector, such as in the financial services sector.

3. The panellists included Anthony Clayton, Professor, Institute for Sustainable Development, University of the West Indies, Vasantha Chase, Director, Chase Consulting Ltd., and Pierre Encontre, Chief, Special Programmes Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Opportunities for small island developing States

4. In relation to the agricultural sector, opportunities discussed by the panel included the optimization of land use through focusing efforts on intensive high-value agriculture, including plant extracts such as ginger and turmeric, food additives and third generation biofuels such as algae. The potential to exploit the emerging markets in these products exist as growth in the food additive-related market in Europe and America has been recorded at more than 10 per cent a year in recent years and the United Kingdom was cited as investing in the world's largest algal biofuel project. Algae has the potential to provide 10,000 to 20,000 gallons of fuel per acre per year, so 85 billion gallons of fuel could be produced on 4.5 million acres (less than half a per cent of current United States farm land), sufficient fuel to

power transport for the United States, making it a more efficient alternative energy source.

5. Energy-related opportunities for small island developing States in renewable energy were considered quite abundant. Most small island developing States have abundant solar and ocean resources and significant wind and hydropower potential. Some also have geothermal resources. A number of examples were provided on how a broad array of small island developing States were developing these resources with a view to reducing harmful emissions and to improve energy efficiency and energy security. In order to develop these renewable energy sources, a small island developing States sustainable energy security framework was suggested. This framework would support energy efficiency, energy security and economic growth, while the ecological efficiency of production and consumption patterns would support climate action and environmental sustainability.

6. In the services sector, it was noted that tourism and offshore services dominate the economic specialization of most small island developing States. These two sectors offer a wealth of opportunities for further development, but it was suggested that such development should be linked to overall economic development. For example, infrastructure development related to tourism should incorporate backward linkages to human resource development and poverty reduction. Offshore services have the potential to act as an engine to reverse the brain drain. It was noted that Mauritius had transformed its economy from an agriculturally based economy to a diversified economy with growing industrial, financial, and tourist sectors. Its main exports include tourism, textiles and apparel, financial services and sugar.

Interactive debate

7. During the interactive debate, representatives touched upon a variety of issues, including potential future initiatives and the role of the United Nations in promoting the development of small island developing States. The representative of Grenada and the Chair of the Association of Small Island States called for an integrated approach in the development of small island developing States within the overall framework of the United Nations. She also emphasized, along with a number of other representatives including Maldives, that small island developing States continue to require special consideration.

8. The representative of Saint Lucia argued that owing to limited resources and the long gestation period required for research and development, it would be difficult for small island developing States to invest in research and development for plant extracts and food additives. Instead, he suggested investment in the development of marine resources.

9. Speaking on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States, the representative of Fiji reminded participants about the findings of the report of the Secretary-General on the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of small island developing States and relevant regional meetings.

10. He spoke of the findings that concluded that progress in addressing the vulnerabilities of small island developing States was inadequate and the resilience of many small island developing States had decreased. The representative called for

creative and constructive ways to address the vulnerabilities of small island developing States and to draw on successful initiatives identified in the regional reports. He called for the recognition of small island developing States as a formal United Nations category. The representative described climate change as a major "disabling" element owing to the impact of water scarcity on food security and flooding and inundation on food production. In relation to energy security, he spoke of successful Pacific partnerships with Italy and Austria that are delivering concrete renewable energy projects based on national priorities.

11. The representative of the Solomon Islands called for increased United Nations presence in the field and monitoring through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The representative of Cuba urged Member States to renew the commitment of the international community to the well-being of small island developing States. The representative of the European Union expressed his appreciation for the sharing of examples of successes in small island developing States by the panellists.

12. In response to the question on a common definition for small island developing States, Mr. Encontre explained that the definition for small island developing States utilized by the United Nation Conference on Trade and Development is for analytical purposes only, and not a common United Nations definition. He recommended the development of a technical assistance framework for small island developing States as an important next step in supporting the development of small island developing States.

13. In response to the comments on the need for continued special consideration for small island developing States, Professor Clayton responded that special and differential treatment is meant as a temporary measure and is not meant to be in place for decades. He argued that such treatment, if prolonged, can lead to protectionism and decreased competitiveness. Professor Clayton explained that small size and island nation status are not necessarily constraints to prosperity, and cited Jamaica and the Cayman Islands as examples of small island States that had successfully transformed their economies in response to market demand. While both countries' economies depend on tourism, it was noted that the Cayman Islands is also a thriving offshore financial centre.

14. On 21 July, the findings of the report of the twelfth session of the Committee for Development Policy were presented, which included a chapter on "Views and perspectives of the Committee for Development Policy on United Nations support for small island developing States". The report noted that, on the whole, small island developing States have consistently maintained good levels of social and economic outcomes that are above the average of developing countries. However, the report also highlighted that several small island developing States lag behind and are included in the list of least developed countries. The Committee for Development Policy underlined that there is a great deal of support by the United Nations system to the small island developing States, but that the information available on such support is too fragmented, incomplete and not sufficiently results-oriented. According to the report of the Committee for Development Policy, this could be due to two factors: first, the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation tends to be too general in scope and lacks concrete targets and milestones; and second, there is limited capacity of monitoring and advocacy structures. In this regard, the Committee for Development Policy suggested that the mandates and operational

functioning of these entities be reviewed and strengthened, and that adequate resources be provided to allow for more effective monitoring and proactive advocacy.

15. The European Union noted with appreciation the report of the Committee for Development Policy, which would likely help to inform the debate during the five-year high-level review of the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation to be held on 24 and 25 September 2010.

16. Saint Lucia underscored that the findings of the Committee for Development Policy are not surprising, and underlined the importance of sustainable development as a concept of integration of activities in various fields. At the moment, Governments hope that sustainable development will result from their activities, as opposed to implementing sustainable development. In the future, the structures that will be put in place should focus on the needs of small island developing States as opposed to the reporting needs of the United Nations system.